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SUBJECT: UKRAINE-ROMANIA RELATIONS: CANCELLED SUMMITS AND ATTACHE EXPULSIONS

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Classified By: Political Counselor Colin Cleary for reasons 1.4(b,d)

Summary

¶1. (C) Despite public assertions by Ukrainian leaders to the contrary, Ukraine's relations with Romania remain strained following the International Court of Justice's February 3 decision on the disputed Snake Island and surrounding territory. The bilateral relationship lacks the concrete cooperation that defines Ukraine's relationship with Poland. Ukrainian officials contend that Romanian politicians are playing up the tension for political advantage in advance of presidential elections there. President Basescu's planned February visit was scrapped when Romania demanded what Ukraine saw as unacceptable conditions to a trans-border travel agreement -- the centerpiece deliverable of the visit.

Ukraine in turn was surprised by the March 2 expulsion of two of its defense attaches. Some in the GOU are concerned that Romania is pursuing a "Greater Romania" policy that would include parts of western Ukraine. End Summary.

Snake Island Decision

¶2. (C) On February 3, the UN International Court of Justice (ICJ) unanimously ruled that Snake Island was a Ukrainian island, but that the surrounding sea shelf would be split between Romania and Ukraine at a line between their respective claims, with Ukraine gaining a 12 nautical mile exclusion zone around the island itself. Both the GOU and the Romanian government have said they would accept the court's decision as final, and both have portrayed the decision as a victory for their respective sides. Ukrainian political analysts Oleksiy Haran told us that it was unclear who won in the ICJ decision, but that opponents of Ukrainian western integration were pushing the idea that Ukraine lost. Bohdan Yaremenko, Deputy Head of the Presidential Secretariat's foreign policy section, told us that the GOU "does not like" the court's decision, but would work out a way to implement it.

Relationship Lacking

¶3. (C) Deputy Presidential Secretariat Head Goncharuk said that the ICJ decision paved the way for closer relations between the two countries. Following a February visit by Deputy Foreign Minister Khandogiy to Bucharest, the MFA stressed Romania's readiness to assist Ukraine in its NATO aspirations. Serhiy Horopakha, MFA desk officer for Romania, told us that, while Ukraine and Romania had an "active political dialogue," the GOU was "doing our best" to have a closer and more mutually beneficial relationship with Romania, "like we do with Hungary and Poland."

¶4. (C) Despite senior MFA officials' public assertions that

Romania would assist Ukraine in its preparations for NATO membership, Horopakha said that no real concrete bilateral work has been undertaken to assist Ukraine in its Euro-Atlantic integration aspirations, or on any other key bilateral or multilateral issue. Horopakha added that, in addition to the Serpent Island issue, relations are hindered by the Bystroe Canal. Natalya Bilotser, a political analyst with the US-Ukraine Foundation, told us that the bilateral relationship is "neither close, nor strategic." She said that Bucharest's approach to Ukraine changed once Romania gained EU membership, and that Romanian counterparts then "became overbearing."

Defense Attaches Expelled

¶15. (C) Boris Tarasyuk, Head of the Rada Committee on European Integration, said publicly that Romanian political leaders were using tension with Ukraine for political advantage in the lead-up to presidential elections there later this year. The Presidential Secretariat's Bohdan Yaremenko, echoing Tarasyuk, told us that the Romanian government was using the recent expulsion of two Ukrainian defense attaches to "gain points" with the electorate. He said that they were seeking to portray Ukraine as "a danger to Romania." Yaremenko said that the expulsion caught Ukraine "totally by surprise. According to the GOU's initial review, the attaches were acting legally, he claimed.

Scuttled Presidential Visit

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¶16. (C) A February 23 visit to Kyiv by President Basescu was scuttled at the last minute when the Romanian side demanded "new and unacceptable conditions" for an agreement on trans-border travel, according to Yaremenko. The agreement was to be the centerpiece deliverable of the second meeting of the Ukraine-Romania Presidential Commission. The Commission was first convened during an October 2007 Yushchenko visit to Romania. MFA desk officer Horopakha could not say when the Basescu visit would be re-scheduled, saying only that the two countries "needed more time to prepare" the visit. Yaremenko, speaking more frankly, said that Romania pushed Ukraine to cancel the visit through its new demands on the trans-border travel agreement, then took five days to agree on a one-sentence joint statement announcing the cancellation. Yaremenko added that the two sides had tentatively scheduled a visit several times in 2008, only to cancel each time (although not, in this case, after the visit had been announced).

"Greater Romania"

¶17. (C) Political analyst Haran told us that Ukrainians were worried about Romanian activities in and designs on the Bukovina region, which includes parts of western Ukraine. Indeed, the Romanian diplomat and attache expelled in the tit for tat expulsions were serving in the Consulate in Chernivtsi Oblast, on the Romanian border, where Romania has been accused of agitating among ethnic Romanian civic organizations.

¶18. (C) Analyst Bilotser told us that, at lower political levels and academic levels, Romania is pushing Ukraine to reclassify Romanian and Moldovan minority groups in Ukraine into one "Romanian Speaking" minority group. She said that there are currently 250,000 self-identified Moldovans in Ukraine, and only 100,000 self-identified Romanians. Combining the two groups would result in a "Romanian Speaking" minority that outnumbered all other minority groups in Ukraine except Russians. Yaremenko told us that the GOU was concerned that the current Romanian government seeks to follow a "Greater Romania" policy that would include parts of

Ukraine, Hungary and Moldova. He concluded that Ukraine's strained relationship with Romania was a serious issue, and said the GOU was "looking at options" to address the worsening relations.

Comment

¶ 9. (C) While the ICJ Snake Island decision can potentially remove a central irritant in the Ukraine-Romania relationship, other territorial, economic and political differences remain between Kyiv and Bucharest. Especially worrying to the GOU are perceptions that Bucharest remains intent on expanding its activities in the Bukovina region. These continued tensions will insure that Kyiv will rely on Poland and other neighbors, rather than Romania, as its guides toward further integration into European and Euro-Atlantic institutions.

TAYLOR